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## **WATER POLLUTION:**

### **EPA admits to misjudging pressure before spill**

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U.S. EPA said it miscalculated how much water pressure was hidden behind debris plugging the Gold King Mine entrance when it accidentally released 3 million gallons of waste into a tributary of the Animas River last week.

EPA on-scene coordinator Hayes Griswold said his team was trying to stick a pipe into the top of the mine in order to safely pump liquid out for treatment. But the effort dislodged too much debris, rupturing the mine's roof and spilling the water contaminated with lead, arsenic and other heavy metals.

"We were very careful," he said (Steve Garrison, [\[Farmington, N.M.\] Daily Times](#), Aug. 10).

This week, EPA is warning farmers, towns and tribes to shut down their water intakes as the plume of contamination passes down stretches of the Animas and San Juan rivers flowing toward Lake Powell.

The agency said contaminants were flowing too fast to be an immediate health threat, and experts say the massive river system will dilute the waste before it can pose a long-term threat.

"The water appears worse aesthetically than it actually is, in terms of health," said Ron Cohen, civil and environmental engineering professor at the Colorado School of Mines.

Still, EPA has closed stretches of the river for drinking and recreation through Monday. The Navajo Nation has declared an emergency and stopped diverting water from the San Juan River.

EPA's warning has brought fear to farmers already suffering a hot, dry summer.

"By the weekend, without any rain, we'll be in trouble," said farmer D'rese Sutherland.

So far, wildlife has not been impacted by the spill, and a test batch of fingerling trout purposely exposed to the water survived over the weekend, officials said ([AP/Los Angeles Times](#), Aug. 10). -- **AW**